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TP-69-Agriculture

Staff Contact: Jonathan Lehman (202) 224-3232

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## ***Freedom to Farm is Forcing Farmers to Fail***

The *Freedom to Farm Act of 1996* is failing America's farmers and ranchers. Over the past two years, family farmers and ranchers have experienced rapid and severe declines in crop and livestock prices resulting in significant decreases in farm income. As a result, farmers and ranchers are being forced out of business and the economic stability of rural communities in many States is being threatened.

**Republican promises on Freedom to Farm.** During debate on *Freedom to Farm* in 1996, Republicans promised that the legislation would:

- raise farm income;
- free farmers to produce for expanding markets;
- clear markets of grain surpluses;
- spend taxpayer dollars responsibly;
- reduce the amount of government red-tape; and
- provide a smooth transition to the free market.

***Freedom to Farm is forcing small farmers and ranchers out of business.*** Despite Republican promises, *Freedom to Farm* has failed to provide small farmers and ranchers with the tools to effectively compete in the market and left them vulnerable to poor market conditions. Additionally, the legislation eliminated an income safety net to safeguard farmers from uncontrollable weather and economic-related events. Ironically, while plummeting prices force farmers and ranchers out of business, Federal spending on agriculture is skyrocketing.

**Multi-billion dollar bailouts are no substitute for equitable farm policy.** In order to curb the immediate loss of family-based agriculture, Senate Democrats succeeded, after five months of resistance by Republican leadership, to enact an \$8.7 billion emergency relief package. Next year, however, the Democrats first priority will be to correct the deficiencies of *Freedom to Farm* by passing substantive reforms rather than simply supporting another emergency package.

**The Democratic Farm Agenda.** Democrats are gravely concerned with the Republican leadership's failure to address the needs of those most threatened by the current crisis—family farms and ranches and rural communities. Democrats will continue to push for substantive policy reforms in 2000. Legislation must be enacted which:

- restores the income safety net;
- increases competition in the livestock and grain industries and cracks down on abuse of market power;
- reforms the Federal Crop Insurance System;
- protects American producers' interests abroad;
- promotes long-term land stewardship practices; and
- encourages and supports economic development in rural areas.